

**Portland State University/Fort Vancouver National Historic Site
Public History Field School
History 511 -- Public History Lab: Historic Site Interpretation**

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Course Description

This upper- division course is designed to build on the context of the Introduction to Public History course by providing a focused, hands- on immersion into how history is promulgated by one of the leading stewards of our nation’s history – the National Park Service (NPS). After establishing a foundation in applicable NPS history, policy, and guidelines, this class will emphasize the dynamic aspects of public history by focusing on the professional field of historical interpretation.

At Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, you will actively apply knowledge gained through group discussion, directed readings, research, practical exercises, peer review, and class instruction. The class will culminate in a special public program where you will present fifteen- minute interpretive talks in accordance with NPS professional interpretive standards.

Throughout the course, you will work within the NPS Interpretive Development Plan (IDP), the leading program for the professionalization of interpretation. It was created to help park rangers “develop effective interpretive skills to facilitate meaningful visitor experiences and encourage stewardship of park resources.” Based on an adaptation of two modules of the IDP, you will gain practical experience in one foundational competency *Meaningful Interpretation: Fulfilling the Mission* and one benchmark competency *The Interpretive Talk*—both designed for entry- level park ranger positions in the NPS.

As this course is a lab, a major portion of your grade will be based on practical exercises and presentations, culminating in your final project: a 15- minute interpretive talk to the general public at the annual Brigade Encampment special event.

Upon completion of this course, you will have gained:

- a strong working knowledge of professional work opportunities in history outside of academia
- in- depth knowledge, via a case- study format, of how history- based programming is created and presented to the public at a unit of the national park system

- practical training you would not normally receive in the traditional history classroom setting
- experience creating and presenting a history- based interpretive talk that meets professional standards in interpretation
- a practical and marketable skill set in historical interpretation
- a fun, creative, and challenging learning experience in your national park

Required Texts

Texts you will need to provide:

- Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*
- Larry Beck & Ted Cable, *Interpretation for the 21st Century: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture*
- National Park Service, *Official National Park Handbook: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*
- William J. Lewis, *Interpreting for Park Visitors*

Texts available online:

- Barry Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Critical Perspective*. Document available online at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/
- *History in the National Park Service: Themes and Concepts*. Document available online at: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/hisnps/NPSThinking/revthem.htm>
- Jane T. Merritt, *Administrative History: Fort Vancouver NHS*. Document available online at: <http://www.nps.gov/fova/adhi/adhi.htm>
- National Park Service. *Draft General Management Plan, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*. Document available online at: <http://www.nps.gov/fova/gmp/gmpo.htm>
- National Park Service. *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site*. Document available online at: <http://www.nps.gov/fova/gmp/agmpt.htm>
- National Park Service, *Long Range Interpretive Plan, Vancouver National Historic Reserve*

I will provide you with copies of pertinent articles and other documents.

Course Requirements & Grading

1. Attendance: with only six course sessions spread over three months, it is critically important that students attend each scheduled class. Attendance is required at all sessions. If extenuating and/or emergency circumstances arise, unavoidable absence can only be approved by me prior to class. Attendance is absolutely mandatory for the final session.

2. Class participation and contribution to group discussion (20%): class participation is another essential component of this course. Participating in group discussions means that you should contribute ideas, insights, questions, experience with and knowledge of class topics that help to clarify and advance the subject under discussion. What you contribute to discussions should reflect a thorough understanding of the assigned readings and other course material, as well as the knowledge you have established through other public history coursework. Are your points substantive and relevant? Are they linked to your peers' comments? Do they clarify and highlight earlier discussion points? Do they lead to a more lucid understanding of the concepts discussed? Do they show evidence of analysis? While the quality is more important than the quantity, the ideal is frequent, high quality participation.

3. Evaluation assignments (30%): each student will be graded on two evaluation projects where they will critique interpretive programs based on class discussions, handouts, and background readings. Students will first follow one of the two new audio tours of the fort, complete a written critique, and discuss their observations. Secondly, students will attend and critique the final presentation of each of their classmates, and provide a written and oral assessment of each.

4. Oral report (20%): Each student will present a 10 minute oral report on a secondary source that contributes to the field of historical interpretation. Students are encouraged to choose from the list below; however, I am open to other sources you choose- - provided that you run it by me for approval prior to beginning your work. These reports will be videotaped, and made available in the park library for staff and volunteers developing programs. This assignment is designed to give students an opportunity to prepare and deliver a germane presentation to peers (and perhaps staff members) in a collegial atmosphere, while also providing the park with additional interpretive resources.

Please follow these guidelines in preparing and delivering your 10- minute reports:

- Address the following questions explicitly
 - What is the major purpose of the work you've chosen?
 - How are the issues of interpretive theory and method addressed?
 - What contribution does this work make to the field of interpretation? Of public history?
 - How can the author's work be practically applied at this national historic site?
 - How can the author's work be practically applied by you and your peers for to the final projects of you and your peers?
- Prepare and rehearse your report
 - Practice your report and keep it within the allotted time

- Don't read your report verbatim
- Maintain eye contact
- Presentation aids (charts, images, etc.) are acceptable, but not required
- Be prepared for questions from the audience
- Remember that everyone is on your side; relax, stay calm, and don't rush through your report
- Potential sources for oral reports
 - Anne M. Derousie & Susan Ferentinos, eds., *Exploring a Common Past: Researching and Interpreting Women's History for Historic Sites*
 - David L. Larsen, ed., *Meaningful Interpretation: How to Connect Hearts and Minds to Places, Objects, and Other Resources*
 - Douglas M. Knudson, Ted T. Cable, & Larry Beck, *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*
 - Gary E. Machlis & Donald R. Field, eds., *On Interpretation: Sociology for Interpreters of Natural and Cultural History*
 - Lisa Brochu & Tim Merriman, *Personal Communication: Connecting Your Audience to Heritage Resources*
 - Sam Ham, *Environmental Education: A Practical Guide*
 - Tim Merriman & Lisa Brochu, *Management of Interpretive Sites: Developing Sustainable Operations Through Effective Leadership*
 - William T. Alderson & Shirley Paine Lowe, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*
 - Other books and articles may be used if discussed with me first

5. Final presentation: (30%): Each student will complete a final presentation. The final presentation will be an interpretive talk that you will develop and present to the public on the final day of class as part of the annual Brigade Encampment special event. In addition to being publicized and open to the public, these talks will be constructively critiqued by both your peers and me. We will use a similar rubric (written standard) to assess the success of your talk as the NPS peer reviewers use.

In order to demonstrate a successful interpretive talk, you must provide a talk that is:

- Successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings/significance inherent in the resource; and is
- Appropriate for the audience, and provides a clear focus for their connection with the resource(s) by demonstrating the cohesive development of a relevant idea or ideas, rather than relying primarily on a recital of a chronological narrative or a series of related facts.

A successful interpretive talk will:

- Communicate an appropriate depth and amount of relevant information
- Communicate an understanding of resources/park story/national significance
- Provide a balance of facts and acknowledges context and multiple points of view
- Use park resources appropriately to create context and support content
- Present talk in an engaging manner appropriate to the audience and the context
- Demonstrate creativity
- Use appropriate logistics
- Encourage or move audience toward higher- level concepts, such as resource protection, stewardship, and global issues as appropriate

Class Schedule

Class 1: Saturday, April 8, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Class 2: Saturday, April 22, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Class 3: Saturday, May 6, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Class 4: Saturday, May 20, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Class 5: Saturday, June 3, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Class 6: Saturday, June 17, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Please note that all classes will be held at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site in Vancouver, Washington.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Week 1 (Saturday, April 8): The National Park Service, History, and Interpretation

- Introduction to the course syllabus
- Introduction to NPS and NPS History
- Introduction to Interpretation
- Introduction to Site via Practical Exercise: view and discuss *One Place Across Time* video
- Assignments for next week (Week 2):
 - Read Tilden, 1- 54
 - Read Beck & Cable, 1- 68
 - Read McIntosh, Chapter 2: “Branching into History” at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/branching.htm
 - Read McIntosh, Chapter 5: “Interpretation in Crisis” at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/interp_in_crisis.htm
 - Read article by David L. Larson, “Be Relevant or Become a Relic: Meeting the Public Where They Are”
 - Read Handbook, 1- 51

Week 2 (Saturday, April 22): Professionalizing Historical Interpretation: an Introduction to the NPS Interpretive Development Program (IDP)

- Interpretive Competencies – Foundational, Benchmark, and Elective

- Introduction to an NPS Foundational Competency
 - Why the NPS does Interpretation – Meeting the NPS Mission
 - What Interpretation Is – Tangibles, Intangibles, and Universal Concepts
 - How Interpretation Works – The Interpretive Equation
- Assignments for Week 3
 - Read Tilden, Chapter 9: Past Into Present (68- 77); Chapter 10: Nothing in Excess (78- 83)
 - Read Beck & Cable, Chapters 7- 15 (68- 161)
 - Read Handbook, 51 to end
 - Read “Interpreting the Site: The Historic Context” in Chapter 8 of the park’s Administrative History at:
<http://www.nps.gov/fova/adhi/adhi8c.htm>
 - Read sections entitled “The Cultural Environment” and “Interpretation in Chapter 3 of the Draft General Management Plan (GMP)”, available online at <http://www.nps.gov/fova/gmp/gmpt.htm>
 - Read the section entitled “Alternative B – Preferred Alternative” in Chapter 4 of the GMP, available at:
<http://www.nps.gov/fova/gmp/gmp4b.htm>
 - be sure to also read the pertinent corrections to the Draft GMP in the Final GMP Chapter 1, Corrections and Revisions, available online at: <http://www.nps.gov/fova/gmp/agmpi.htm>
 - Begin developing prospective topic for interpretive talk

Week 3 (Saturday, May 6): Introduction to a Benchmark Interpretive Competency

- Preparing and Presenting an Effective Interpretive Talk
 - Talk Organization
 - Interpretive Program Research
 - Themes, Goals, and Objectives
 - Presentation Techniques
 - Delivering an Interpretive Talk & Assessing Its Interpretive Value
- Special Presentation: Resources Available in the Park Collections (Tessa Langford, Curator)
- Special Presentation: Background on Special Events and Brigade Encampment (NPS Staff)
- Individual Topic Discussion/Research (I will be available to discuss potential topics)
- Assignments for Week 4
 - Read Lewis, 1- 91
 - Read Long Range Interpretive Plan
 - Prepare oral report
 - Prepare prospective topic for interpretive talk

Week 4 (Saturday, May 20): Additional Resources for Historical Interpretation

- Oral reports (first group)
- Deadline for topic selection for interpretive talk
- Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Interpretive Program
- Practical Exercise: Audio Tour
 - Take audio tour program
 - Evaluate program individually
 - Group discussion of program evaluation
- Time for Research and Program Development
- Assignments for Week 5
 - Read Lewis, Chapter 8: Self Evaluation (136- 150)
 - Prepare oral report
 - Develop interpretive talk

Week 5 (Saturday, June 3): Developing Your Historical Interpretation Talk

- Oral reports (second group)
- Time for research and program development
- Assignments for Week 6
 - Finalize interpretive talk
 - Prepare TGOs and outline of interpretive talk for peers
 - Prepare for critiquing peer interpretive talks

Week 6 (Saturday, June 17): Hands- on Public History: Presenting Your Interpretive Talk

- Presentation of individual interpretive talks at Brigade Encampment special event
- Peer evaluation
- Class evaluation and close- out